

Italians in Australia: Migration and Profile

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This article gives a detailed analysis and breakdown of the Italian community in Australia, its immigration pattern and phases, and its demographic and socio-economic make-up. Where relevant, comparisons are made with other immigrant minority groups in Australia.

Italian immigration to Australia

The initial type of immigration of Italians to Australia has been described as «drop» migration (Gentili, 1983, p. 10). This describes the pattern where individual migrants moved to another country either alone or with very few companions. This was the norm in the last century and the beginning of this one. Later on, as soon as sizeable groups established themselves in Australia, Italians adopted a «chain» type of immigration (Tosi, 1984, p. 51; Gentili, 1983). This term is used to describe the migration pattern when a family or an individual, after having settled down in Australia, then sponsors the migration of other members of its family or of people from the same town, who in turn are provided with an efficient means of finding help and a welcome abroad. These migration chains have been functioning since the turn of the century and have actually kept functioning across successive generations, and, thanks to the «Family Reunion» immigration policy of today, to a certain degree they are still functioning today.

This form of migration favoured the formation of regional nuclei. Most notable have been the Sicilian groups of Messina in Subiaco (Western Australia), of Naso in Fremantle (Western Australia), and the group from Vizzini in Carlton and the Sicilians in Brunswick, both inner Melbourne suburbs (Victoria); the group from Casilonia and Caulonia in Adelaide (Southern Australia); and the Sicilians and Venetians of Leichhardt an inner suburb of Sydney (New South Wales) (Bertelli, 1986, 1987, p. 43; Ware, 1981, p. 14).

Throughout its history Italian immigration to Australia has received some attention from researchers. It is interesting to note that these researchers have chosen different time spans into which to divide Italian immigration to Australia. Pyke (1948), mainly due to the early date of his research, chose four major periods: from the beginning to 1891; 1892-1918; 1919-1928 and 1928 to the 1940's. Price (1963) divided the early period of the migration of Italians to Australia into five periods: from the beginning to 1896; 1897-1906; 1907-1919; 1920-1929 and 1930-1939. Gentili (1973) chose four periods: 1840-1901; 1902-1930; 1931-1945 and 1946-1970. Other studies have arbitrarily divided time equally into five or ten year periods regardless of what had occurred in those times (see Gentili, 1983). The discussion on Italian immigration in this article will follow Bertelli's (1986, 1987) model, which categorizes Italian immigration to Australia into four time periods: from the beginning to 1946; from World War Two to the mid sixties; from 1966 to 1975; and from 1976 to the present.

From the beginning to 1946. This period was characterized by few «real» migrants and by many *avventurieri*, or adventurers. *Avventurieri* refers to people who dedicated themselves more to supporting the economy of the various mining centres than to actually settling down. The 1921 census shows only 8,135 Italians (by birth or holding an Italian Passport) living in Australia, and by 1933 this figure had increased to 27,000 (Rosoli, 1989, p. 17; Bertelli, 1987, p. 31; Ware, 1981, pp. 11-13). But in fact the real number of Italians who came to Australia (and then left) from colonization till World War One is thought to have been between 100,000 and 125,000. This discrepancy between the census figures and the

estimated number is due to the large number of Italian migrants returning to Italy. In the period 1903-1904 more than 90% of immigrant arrivals actually departed within a very short time and therefore do not appear in the census figures. Thompson (1980) quotes the Italian Consul-General of Melbourne in 1905, Cav. Camillo Bertola, reporting that the official Commonwealth shipping returns for the year 1904 showed 46,336 Italian immigrants arriving in Australia and 44,947 Italian emigrants departing in the same year. Bertola suggested that the main reasons for these returns were the hostility and discrimination shown by Australians to migrants upon their arrival. These hostilities were mainly due to the fear of job losses and competition for the few jobs available. Thompson (1980) in her study of migrants in the 1970's also reports the build up of stress, for reasons similar to those reported by Bertola, as the main cause of illness among migrants and for their decision to return to Italy.

Few Italian migrants are recorded in history or actually «remembered», but we are aware that the two Italian explorers, Pigafetta and Padre Riccio were among the first to visit this continent, and that when the *Endeavour* sailed into Botany Bay there was an Italian seaman on board. The Eureka Stockade also made the name of Carbone famous (Bertelli, 1986, p. 89; 1987, p. 31; Cresciani, 1985, pp. 26-27; Pyke, 1948, p. 100).

Italian migrants began arriving in Australia in the 1840's. The first groups were made up of missionaries and political refugees. In 1847 a group of 200 fishermen from Grottaferrata in Sicily settled in Fremantle (Western Australia) (Cresciani, 1986, p. 2). Most of the ones that did settle in Australia worked in the rural areas of New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland. Some became owners of farms or small industries and some embarked on small commercial ventures, while only very few professionals were able to get established in the major urban centres. According to Bertelli (1986, 1987, p. 32) and Cresciani (1985, pp. 27-91, 1986, p. 2) the descendants of these early Italian settlers were, for the most part, assimilated in Australian society and only a few participated actively within the Italian community.

From World War Two to the mid sixties. Following the end of the Second World War, when it proved impossible to maintain the number of British immigrants, Australia opened its doors to non-English speaking migrants, adhering to the myth «populate or perish». Policies, however still followed the White Australia Policy to exclude all coloured people from entering Australia. This led to a preference of European migrants (Cresciani, 1985, p. 94; Vasta, 1985, p. 3; and especially Ronan, 1974 for a detailed analysis of Australian immigration and its policies). In 1951 an Assisted Migration Agreement between Italy and Australia (Accordo di emigrazione assistita tra Italia e Australia) was signed. It was during this period that Italians migrated to Australia in the greatest numbers: in the period 1941 to 1961 over 330,000 Italians settled in Australia, with only 20,000 of them returning to Italy (Cresciani, 1985, p. 95; Rosoli, 1989, p. 17).

The migrants from this period form the statistical backbone of the Italian community today. It was in this period also that southern Italians started to migrate to Australia in larger numbers. The majority of this group included families whose only asset was the support of relatives already here. Although among them there were very few professional and trade qualifications, they all had a will to work hard. Because of this enthusiasm to work they often accepted any type of work, irrespective of their qualifications or past experience. In fact it was reported that a large number of professional people ended up cutting cane in Queensland (Bertelli, 1987, pp. 32-35).

From 1966 to 1975. In the sixties there was an influx of Sicilians, victims of an earthquake. Apart from that, the immigration of Italians was not on the same scale as in the previous period. Whereas the previous period saw an average of 17,000 immigrants per year coming to Australia, only 126,000 came to Australia in the 1966-1975 period and out of these, 33,000 returned to Italy at an average of 9,300 per year (Rosoli, 1989, p. 17; Ware, 1981, pp. 15-17). The immigrants in this group were of a different make-up from those of the previous periods. They were socially, politically and professionally better

qualified (often holding degrees and diplomas); and, therefore, were able to cope with being in a different country better than the migrants that had preceded them. For a large number of them migration, especially in the seventies, did not arise from an urgent need to feed and clothe their family, but from a need to enrich themselves through new and fruitful experiences. These people had specific and clear ideas about workers' rights, social and welfare rights and the need for community participation (Bertelli, 1987, p. 36). It is interesting to note that these differences set them apart from and put them at odds with the rest of the Italian community. This is because the community as a whole had more practical concerns and needs. However, because of their more educated background they did have a positive influence on the Italian community by pointing out and helping to solve many issues over a wide array of socio-cultural themes, which up until then they had not been aware of or did not know how to tackle. These issues include legal, human and work rights (Bertelli, 1987, p. 36).

From 1976 to the present. In the seventies Australia went through a period of political, social and economic stability. The immigration program was greatly reduced, and this, together with an improvement in the Italian economy, has contributed to the decrease in Italian immigration to Australia. In 1977, only 1,900 Italians were recorded to have arrived in Australia. The figure peaked to 2,511 in 1981 only to drop below 1,000 each following year after that. The few who did come were mainly elderly people who migrated to live with their relatives. At the same time the number of Italians returning to Italy and the passing away of Italians who have been here a long time, have reversed the flow of numbers between Italy and Australia, so that at in some years there are more Italians returning to Italy than Italians migrating to Australia. Bureau of Immigration and Population Research immigration figures for 1996-7 showed that 272 people arrived from Italy while 215 «Italians» departed Australia. The figures for 1997-1998 showed that 201 arrived from Italy and 168 departed from Australia.

It is interesting to note that while before the 1939-1945 war the majority of Italian migrants came from the north of Italy, after the war they were predominantly from the south, particularly from Sicily and Calabria. But representatives of each Italian region can be found settled here. In the period 1959-1979, 15,665 came to settle in Australia from the north of Italy; 11,662 came from central Italy, 78,271 from the south and 35,615 came from the two islands of Sicily and Sardinia (Bertelli, 1987, p. 42).

During this period, and even as early as in the late sixties, Italian migrants did not feel the need to remain together. For varying reasons after a settling-in time migrants move out of the suburbs they originally settled in and move into areas which do not offer the same community support or the same regional ties. This is particularly true of the second generation as they move away from home in search of job and marriage opportunities.

Community profile

In the following sections a detailed profile of the Italian community in Australia will be presented. Due to the complex nature of the census data, the profile will look at two different aspects of the community: 1) those born in Italy and living in Australia; 2) and those born in Australia of direct Italian descent (the second generation), that is, people with at least one parent born in Italy.

The census data in this section was obtained from The Department of Immigration and Multicultural affairs Community Profiles Census: Italy-born, Canberra: AGPS, 1990, 1994 and 1999.

Numbers. As we can see in Table 1 the Italy-born group is the largest non-English speaking group in Australia¹. According to the 1996 census the Italian community consists of around 572,300 people. Of these 238,263, or 1.5% of the total Australian population, were actually born in Italy. The census also shows that 334,000 were born in Australia from one or both parents born in Italy. This makes the total

number of Italo-Australians about 3.5% of the entire Australian population.

Table 1. *Population of Australia by birth place, 1991 (absolute values and percentages).*

Country of birth	Persons	%
Australia	12,725,163	75.5
United Kingdom ^a	1,118,675	6.6
New Zealand	276,062	1.6
Other main English speaking countries ^b	176,525	1.0

Victoria					
New South Wales	51,545	47,604	99,149	41.6	-6.5
Southern Australia	35,532	30,632	66,164	27.8	-5.7
Western Australia	14,319	12,866	27,185	11.4	-6.0
Queensland	13,496	11,645	25,141	10.6	-5.8
Australian Capital Territory	9,061	7,216	16,277	6.8	-4.0
Tasmania	1,409	1,156	2,565	1.1	-4.6
Northern Territory	727	509	1,236	0.5	-6.5
	374	172	546	0.2	-9.2
Australia	126,463	111,800	238,263	100.0	-6.0

*Numbers rounded off to the nearest tenth of one percent.

Adapted from: *Community Profiles 1996 census «Italy-born»*, 1999.

From Table 3 a comparison between the 1986 and 1996 censi can be made, and the changes in the Italy-born population in the major centres can be observed. The table shows that between 1991 and 1996 the Italy-born population in Australia decreased by 5.9%. This followed a 5.1% decline between 1981 and 1986 (from around 275,000 in the 1981 census to around 261,000 of the 1986 census) and a 3.0% drop from 1986 to 1991 (to about 253,000 in 1991). Not following the trends registered at state level the biggest decreases in the 1991 census were experienced in Sydney (4.3%) and Wollongong (-3.5%). This was followed by 5.9% and 5.1% drops in 1996. Queensland had seen increases in both the 1986 and 1991 censi, due to the large increase, seen in Table 3, of its Gold Coast-Tweed Heads area. Here the Italy-born population increased by 51.2% between 1981 and 1986 and then it increased a further 46.3% between 1986 and 1991. However, this area saw a more moderate increase (21.8%) in the 1996 census and contributed to a drop of 4.0% in overall numbers in Queensland. The types of people who make up Queensland's Italy-born community are made evident when we realize that 77.3% are aged 45 and over. The same age group in Victoria made up 69.2% of that states Italy-born population, while in New South Wales it was 69.5%. Table 3 also shows that the Italy-born are mainly urban based with only 11.5% (down from 11.9% in 1986) living outside of the major urban centres in 1991. This compares with 31.2% for the total Australian population and 9.5% for all overseas born from Non-English-Speaking (NES) countries.

The highest proportion of Italy-born people in 1996 were found in Payneham (Southern Australia) which has 11.1% (1,718) of its population born in Italy. The next highest proportions are found in Campbelltown (Southern Australia) (11.1% - 4,884), and Moreland (Victoria) (10% - 13,057). Moreland also happens to have the largest number of Italy-born, 13,057, living there.

Table 3. *Concentrations of Italy-born population in major locations (1986-1996).*

Major locations*	1986		1991		1996			
	Numbers	change 1981-1986 (%)	Numbers	change 1986-1991 (%)	Numbers	change 1991-1996 (%)	% of Italy-born population in state	% of Italy-born population in Australia
Sydney	59,581	-4.9	56,828	-4.3	53,502	-5.9	80.9	22.5
Newcastle	1,757	-9.6	1,745	-1.8	1,248	-28.5	1.9	0.5
Wollongong	4,964	-6.3	4,799	-3.5	4,555	-5.1	6.9	1.9
Melbourne	96,709	-5.5	94,155	-2.6	88,164	-6.4	88.9	37.0
Geelong	2,395	-4.7	2,374	-0.5	2,191	-7.7	2.2	0.9

Brisbane	8,068	-1.3	8,062	0.7	7,769	-3.6	47.7	3.3
Gold Coast-Tweed	974	51.2	1,211	46.3	1,475	21.8	na	0.6
Adelaide	27,353	-4.9	26,750	-2.1	25,246	-5.6	92.9	10.6
Perth	24,247	-4.3	23,677	-2.6	22,407	-5.4	89.1	9.4
Hobart	780	-6.0	798	2.7	762	-4.5	61.7	0.3
Darwin	490	-7.0	360	27.2	378	5.0	69.2	0.2
Canberra-Queanbeyan	3,293	-1.9	3,280	0.3	3,140	-4.3	na	1.3
Other locations	31,278	-6.6	29,211	-5.7	27,474	-5.9	na	11.5
Total	261,889	-5.1	253,250	-3.0	238,311	-5.9	na	100.0

*Capital cities are «Statistical Divisions», Gold Coast-Tweed and Canberra-Queanbeyan are «Statistical Districts» and other locations are «Statistical Subdivisions» as defined by Australian Standard Geographical Classification.

Source: 1981 Census - Table FUL11

1986 Census - Matrix Tape USH012/CX0250

1991 Census - Customized Matrix Table USC6013

1996 Census - Customized Matrix Table CS070

From: *Community Profile «Italy-born»*, 1990, 1994 and 1999.

na = not applicable.

Age. The 1996 census figures outline the relatively old age of the Italy-born community as compared to some other overseas born communities. Table 4 shows that the median age of the Italy-born community had increased from 50.1 years in 1986, 54.0 years in 1991 to 58.1 years in 1996; compared to 34 years for the total Australian population and 44.2 years for all overseas born. In Table 4 we can also see that while all groups showed an increase in their median age between 1986 and 1996 the increase shown by the Italy-born is quite a significant one.

Table 4. *Median age (in years).*

Census Year	Italy-born	All overseas born	Total Australian population
1986	50.1	40.7	31.1
1991	54.0	42.0	32.0
1996	58.1	44.2	34.0

From: *Community Profile «Italy-born»*, 1990, 1994 and 1999.

The aging of the Italy-born is more clearly evident when we compare the over 35 age group. Table 5 shows that in 1991 89.3% of the Italy-born community are aged more than 35 years. This compares with only 45.7% for the total population of Australia, and 64.4% for all the overseas born.

Table 5. *Population over 35 years of age (percentages).*

Census Year	Italy-born	All overseas born	Total Australian population
1991	89.3	64.4	45.7

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The pace at which the Italy-born community is ageing is also evident in a comparison of the figures for the age group 55 and over from the last two census. These show that this group increased from being 36.7% of the community in 1986, 47.8% in 1991 to 57% in 1996; a rise of 20% in 10 years. Another significant increase was in the 65+ age group which increased from 14.2% in 1986, to 21.4% in 1991 and to 31.2% in 1996.

Table 6. *Age and gender in Australia (absolute values and percentages).*

	0-4		5-14		15-24		25-44		45-64		65+	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Males	118	0.1	376	0.3	1,375	1.1	22,420	17.7	62,706	49.6	39,468	31.2
Females	86	0.1	345	0.3	1,068	1.0	20,239	18.1	55,105	49.3	34,957	31.3
Persons	204	0.1	721	0.3	2,443	1.0	42,659	17.9	117,811	49.4	74,425	31.2

Adapted from: *Community Profiles 1996 Census «Italy-born»*, 1999, p. 9.

Source: 1996 Census - Customized Matrix Table CS072.

Table 6 shows the breakdown of the Italy-born in Australia by age and gender. It highlights the aging nature of the group. The table shows that about 80% of the Italy-born community are aged 45+. In actual fact 31.2% are of retirement ages. While only 1.4% is aged 0-24 years.

Socio-economic make-up of the Italy-born. The decision to come to Australia was often made for purely economic reasons. Friends, relatives and government propaganda painted a very attractive picture of Australia, especially to people living in the aftermath of the Second World War. For many coming to Australia did bring a possibility to be (socially) upwardly mobile, something which they would not have experienced in their home country. Farmers became blue collar workers, shop owners, business people and contractors. And, nowadays, Italian names are found in high places in industry, commerce and, progressively, even in politics.

Qualifications. In 1996 26% of the Italy-born over the age of 15 had obtained some form of qualification. This number is slightly higher than the 1991 figure of 25.5% but lower than the 42.3% of the total Australian population. The census data also shows that only 4.8% of the Italy-born had post-secondary qualifications compared to 16.7% for the total Australian population. Table 7 presents a breakdown of the qualifications by gender. This table indicates that the main differences between men and women are that men (33.2%) are more likely to have any qualification at all compared to women (18.0%). It also shows a big difference in the Skilled Vocational category with 16.6% of the men holding a qualification compared to only 2.6% of the women. Adding up the numbers of those who had attained post-secondary qualifications we notice that men at 5.5% outnumber women (3.9%) in this category as well.

Table 7. *Qualifications by gender, 1996 (main differences in bold). (Absolute values and percentages).*

Level of qualification	Males		Females		Persons	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Skilled vocational	20,960	16.6	2,854	2.6	23,814	10.0
Basic vocational	1,375	1.1	1,442	1.3	2,817	1.2
Bachelor degree	3,000	2.4	1,671	1.5	4,671	2.0

Under graduate diploma	1,508	1.2	1,309	1.2	2,817	1.2
Associate diploma	1,240	1.0	578	0.5	1,818	0.8
Post graduate diploma	443	0.4	521	0.5	964	0.4
Higher degree	685	0.5	274	0.2	959	0.4
Other*	12,557	10.0	11,376	10.2	23,933	10.1
Total qualified	41,768	33.2	20,025	18.0	61,793	26.0
No qualification**	82,768	65.7	89,738	80.6	172,506	72.7
Not stated	1,429	1.1	1,565	1.4	2,994	1.3
Total	125,965	100.0	111,328	100.0	237,293	100.0

*Comprises level of attainment inadequately described and level of attainment not stated.

**Includes persons still at school.

Source: 1991 Census - Customized Matrix Table CSC6026.

Adapted from: *Community Profiles 1996 Census «Italy-born»*, 1999, p. 17.

Labour force participation. In this category especially is the aging of the Italy-born community more apparent. The figures in this category reflect the decline of the participation of people simply becoming too old for work. In 1986 56.5% of the Italy-born were participants in the labour force. This had declined to 51.9% in 1991, which was lower than the 59.8% for immigrants from NES countries. This had decreased to 43.4% in January 1994 and by the time of the 1996 census this figure had further dropped to 41.7%. Women fared worst with 70.7% of them out of the labour force, compared to 46.2% of the men. Table 8 gives further indications how the aging Italy-born community is faring in the job stakes. Both men and women show significantly larger proportions of people out of work compared to the rest of the overseas-born and all the Australian-born. In the other age groups, the numbers were similar to those for all Australians.

Table 8. *People in the 45-64 years age group not in the labour force, 1996 (percentages).*

	Italy-born	All overseas born	Total Australian population
Men	30.3	24.5	22.9
Women	66.7	49.7	46.4

From: *Community Profiles 1996 Census «Italy-born»*, 1999, p. 18.

Unemployment. In 1991 when the total Australian population had an unemployment rate of 11.6% the Italy-born community had a rate of 9.2% while immigrants from NES countries showed a rate of 16.8%. In 1994 the unemployment rate for the Italy-born was 6.2%. The 1996 census showed the unemployment numbers at a low 3.0%. The Italian community over the years has been characterized by a relatively stable employment record. It has consistently achieved very low numbers of unemployed workers amongst all the ethnic groups in Australia.

However Bertelli (1987, p. 48) and others (see Price, 1989; Ware, 1981, p. 38; and see Favero and Tassello 1986, pp. 59-61) have suggested that these numbers do not reflect the real situation. They posit that since so many Italians are now close to retiring age, often those that find themselves without work do not go out and actively look for work, nor do they enroll with the employment services. This swells the numbers for the people out of the labour force and shrinks those for the unemployed.

Occupation. The 1996 census shows that the main occupations for Italy-born were Tradespersons and Related Workers, 20.2%; Labourers and Related Workers, 13.7%; Managers and Administrators, 11.6%; and Intermediate Production and Transport Workers, 11.5%. The representation of Italy-born in these occupations was higher than of the total Australian population. Table 9 shows that the major difference between males and females was in the occupations of Tradespersons Related Workers with 27.2% of the males and only 6.0% of the females. Other occupations with significantly more men than women represented were Intermediate Production and Transport Workers and Managers and Administrators. However, in the clerical, sales and service occupations more women than men were represented.

Table 9. *Occupation by gender (percentages).*

Occupation	Males	Females
Tradespersons related workers	27.2	6.0

Source: 1996 Census - Customized matrix Table CS085.

Adapted from: *Community Profiles 1996 Census «Italy-born»*, 1999, p. 21.

Industry participation. The industrial and service sectors, which include a large number of Italian owners and operators, show the largest amount of Italian participation. The Wholesale and Retail Trade and the Manufacturing sectors with 19.9% show the highest rate of participation of Italy-born. Construction with 19.7% is also well represented. Compared to 1991 it shows a slight shift towards Construction (18.4% in 1996) and away from Manufacturing (23.0%) and the Wholesale and Retail sector (21.6%). Other sectors which have a higher than average participation of Italy-born members are Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting. The biggest differences between males and females are found in Health and Community Services which with 12.3% of the females shows a much higher participation rate than the 2.1% of the males. While in construction males with 19.2% far outnumber the females with 4.0%. Another sector where men outnumber women is Manufacturing, with males at 19.4% and females at 14.5%. Other sectors where females are better represented than men are Finance and Insurance, with 3.6% of the women and only 1.5% of the men, and Education where women show a 6.9% participation rate compared to men with only 2.1%.

Income. Economically the Italian community is, on the whole, comfortably well off. The proportion of Italo-Australians owning their own home is the highest of all the ethnic groups in Australia. This is a clear indication of how they have integrated in the Australian economic society. The aging of the community is also reflected in the figures for income earned. In 1991 54.8% of the Italy-born in Australia earned less than \$ 16,000 per year. This was a higher figure than the 49.7% for the total Australian population. In 1996 the percentage had risen to 62.6%. This was somewhat higher than for the overseas-born people (52.8%) and for all Australians (50.8%).

Table 10. *People earning A\$ 16,000 or less, 1991 (percentages).*

Males	43.1	38.9	38.4	42.1	34.5
Females	68.2	61.7	60.6	61.1	59.9

Adapted from: *Community Profiles 1991 Census «Italy-born»*, 1994.

*NES = People from Non-English-Speaking countries.

**MES = People from Mainly-English-Speaking countries (for example, New Zealand, UK, Singapore, etc.).

As we can see in Table 10 the proportions of Italy-born males and females earning A\$ 16,000 or less are higher than for all other comparable groups. The 1991 census figures also indicate that the Italy-born have a lower than average proportion in the A\$ 25,000 and over income group. In this group we see only 17.0% of the Italy-born, compared to 22.0% of the total Australian population. The figures from the 1996 census show that the Italy-born is still lagging behind the other groups in terms of earning power. The percentage of people earning less than A\$ 16,000 per year had increased to 48% for men and to 72.4% for women.

Education. The 1996 census figures show that 67.6% of the Italy-born population did not continue their schooling after 16 years of age. The data tells us that 4.9% of the Italy-born men and 7.1% of the women never attended school. In comparison the figure for the total Australian population is less than one percent. Table 11 shows that in 1991 only 17.3% of the Italy-born males remained at school after 17 compared to 12.0% for the females. These figures are noticeably lower than the average in Australia. Also, only 24.4% of the Italy-born completed their secondary schooling compared to 50.4% for the total Australian population. In 1996 the figures had risen to 26% for persons in the Italy-born community who stayed at school after 17 years of age.

Table 11. *Persons remaining at school after 17 years of age, 1991 (percentages).*

Gender	Italy-born	Australian-born	Overseas born-MES	Overseas born-NES
Males	17.3	30.7	31.0	44.7
Females	12.0	28.5	29.7	40.6

Adapted from: *Community Profiles 1991 Census «Italy-born»*, 1994.

Citizenship. People who have settled in Australia from Italy over the last 15 years have shown lower than average rates of taking up Australian citizenship. This is clearly evident in Table 12 which shows that the rate of citizenship is above average for Italy-born who have settled in Australia for 15 years or longer. However, in the ensuing years the rate of taking up Australian citizenship has dropped below that for all overseas-born immigrants; only to rise above the latter group in the period 1993-1996.

Table 12. *Citizenship rate (percentage) by period of residence in Australia: Italy-born and total overseas born.*

	Pre-1981	1981-1985	1986-1990	1991-1992	1993-1994	1995-1996
Italy-born	80	50	48	47	31	23
Total overseas-born	78	77	66	59	29	5

From: *Community Profiles 1996 Census «Italy-born»*, 1999, p. 12.

In 1996 the rate of citizenship for all overseas born was 67.3%, an increase of 5.9% from 1991. The rate of people with Australian citizenship for the Italy-born in 1991 was 77.2% and in 1996 it had increased

to 78.7% and, it was 79.8% for those who had resided in Australia for more than 15 years.

Linguistic profile of the Italy-born. The 1996 census shows that all the Italy-born persons² spoke a language other than English at home. The number of these who claimed to speak Italian was 199,144 or 83.7%. These figures show a steady decline in the number of Italian speakers in this group through the past few censi. In 1991 the Italian speakers in this group numbered 221,147 persons, or 87.7%. This was a 2.9% drop from the 227,685 in 1986. The changes in the numbers of speakers can be seen in Table 13. It is interesting to note the decrease of Italian speakers in each age group and the overall increase of English-only speakers, from 11.2% to 14.7%. This increase is more pronounced in the 45-64 age group, where the numbers almost doubled from one census to the other.

Table 13. *Language spoken at home in Australia by age (persons aged 5 and over). (Absolute values and percentages).*

Age Group (years)	Language	1991		1996	
		No.	%	No.	%
5-14	Italian	805	72.8	488	67.6
	English only	201	17.7	135	18.7
	Other*	108	9.5	98	13.6
	Total	1,114	100.0	721	100.0
15-44	Italian	57,050	77.6	30,932	68.6
	English only	15,598	21.2	13,382	29.7
	Other*	885	0.9	788	1.7
	Total	73,533	100.0	45,102	100.0
45-64	Italian	112,796	91.4	99,467	84.4
	English only	9,501	7.7	16,617	14.1
	Other*	1139	0.6	1,727	1.5
	Total	123,436	100.0	117,811	100.0
65+	Italian	50,476	93.6	68,257	91.7
	English only	3,031	5.6	4,848	6.5
	Other*	427	0.6	1,320	1.8
	Total	53,934	100.0	74,425	100.0
Total	Italian	221,127	87.7	199,144	83.7
	English only	28,331	11.2	34,982	14.7
	Other*	2559	0.7	3,933	1.7
	Total	252,017	100.0	238,059	100.0

*Includes Other language indicated, but language not stated.

Source: 1991 Census - Customized matrix Table CSC6015.

1996 Census - Customized matrix TABLE CS072.

Adapted from: *Community Profile «Italy-born»*, 1994, p. 39 and 1999, p. 31.

Table 13 also shows that the number of Italian speakers in the 5-14 age group has decreased dramatically. This reflects the migration trends of the last two decades or so which have seen very few Italian migrants coming to settle in Australia.

Table 13 also shows that in 1991 28,331 or 11.2% of Italy-born persons claimed to speak only English. This had climbed to 34,982, or 14.7% in 1996. Table 14 gives a breakdown of the English language proficiency claimed by the Italy-born community.

It shows that while the numbers claiming to speak only English rose between the two censi, actual

numbers decreased slightly in all the other categories. In term of the percentage of people in the Italy-born group the drop in each category is not significant. For example, while the number of people claiming not to speak English at all fell from 8,635 persons in 1991 to 6,881 in 1996 percentage wise it is only a 0.5% drop. As expected, 82.4% of these are in the 65+ age group and 73% are women.

From Table 14 we can also see a heavy imbalance between the sexes as far as English proficiency is concerned. In both censi men who say they speak English only outnumber women by more than ten thousand. This imbalance is clearly evident in the table which also shows that women reported lower English proficiency than men in all categories.

Table 14. *English proficiency by gender, 1991-1996 (persons aged 5 and over). (Absolute values and percentages).*

Speak English	Males				Females				Persons			
	1991		1996		1991		1996		1991		1996	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Only	19,291	14.3	23,285	18.4	9,026	7.7	11,697	10.5	28,317	11.2	34,982	14.7
Very well	40,241	29.8	35,162	27.8	33,561	28.6	30,426	27.2	73,802	29.2	65,588	27.6
Well	47,448	35.1	42,754	33.8	37,433	31.9	35,692	31.9	84,881	33.6	78,446	33.0
Not well	24,835	18.4	21,576	17.1	30,329	25.8	27,296	24.4	55,164	21.8	48,872	20.5
Not at all	2,406	1.8	1,851	1.5	6,229	5.3	5,030	4.5	8,635	3.4	6,881	2.9

Note: The categories «Speak English Very well», «Well», «Not well», and «Not at all» were for those people that answered the census question on speaking English and Other Language.

The persons who did not report a language but answered the question on English proficiency were excluded from the original table as it was not clear which language they used.

Source: 1991 Census - Customized Matrix Table CSC6016.

1996 Census - Customized Matrix Table CSC6016.

Adapted from: *Community Profile «Italy-born»*, 1994, p. 37 and 1999, p. 29.

The second generation

It is interesting to note that, for reasons of confidentiality³, considerably little information has been processed for the second generations of immigrant communities in Australia. For example, the publication by The Department of Immigration and Multicultural affairs *Community Profiles 1996 Census: Italy-born*, Canberra: AGPS, dedicates thirty four pages to the first generation and only six pages to the second generation.

Numbers and breakdown by gender. In 1991 there were 327,101 second generation Italian-Australians. This was an 8.7% rise from the 300,946 in 1986. In 1996 this had further increased by 2.1% to 334,036. The figures for the second generation also highlight the relative old age of the Italy-born community when we see that the second generation outnumbers the first by about 40.2% and that in 1996 74% of the second generation was aged under 35 years. Table 15 has a breakdown of the second generation by gender and age in Australia. What the table also shows is that the marked difference in numbers between males and females found in the first generation has not carried through to the second generation. As we can see in Table 15 out of the 334,048 persons making up the second generation 169,683, or 50.8%, are male and 164,365 or 49.2%, are female.

Table 15. *The second generation by age and gender, 1996, in Australia (absolute values and percentages).*

	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Males	31,039	18.3	42,321	24.9	53,059	31.3	29,661	17.5	13,603	8.0	169,683	100.0
Females	29,281	17.8	40,399	24.6	51,610	31.4	28,695	17.5	14,380	8.7	164,365	100.0
Persons	60,320	18.1	82,720	24.8	104,669	31.3	58,356	17.5	27,983	8.4	334,048	100.0

Adapted from: *Community Profile «Italy-born»*, 1994, p. 43 and 1999, p. 35.

Source: 1991 Census - Customized Matrix Table CSC6017 and CSC6041.

1996 Census - Customized Matrix Table CS082.

Qualifications of the second generation. The data from all the censi shows that the second generation is more qualified than the first generation. In 1996 43.7% (up from the 37.0% in 1991) of the second generation had attained some form of qualification compared to the 26% of the Italy-born. As can be seen in Table 16 this is higher than the 41.9% for the total Australian population, and the 40.7% for the second generation of all overseas-born parentage.

Table 16. *Qualified persons (percentages).*

Italian second generation	Italy-born	Second generation all overseas-born	Total Australian population
43.7	26.0	40.7	41.9

From: *Community Profiles 1996 Census «Italy-born»*, 1999, p. 36.

In 1996 the rate for second generation Italians obtaining a post secondary qualification was 17.6%, a substantial rise from the 11.8% in 1991. The 1996 rate was higher than the level for the total Australian population (16.5%), but similar to the 17.3% for the second generation of all overseas-born parentage. The rate, however, was much higher than that of the first generation, which in 1996 was only 4.7%.

Women in the second generation in 1996 had acquired higher qualifications than men. 1991 had attained educational or vocational qualifications compared to 32.9% for females. The figures for all the Australian-born was 42.5% for males and 31.0% for females. Table 17 shows that the main difference between second generation men and women is that 22.3% of the men held qualifications in the Skilled Vocational category where only 5.3% of the women held similar qualifications. In 1991 two thousand fewer women than men had a Bachelor Degree. By 1996 the numbers were fairly even with women showing slightly fewer numbers but a higher percentage. Women, however, were still behind men in the Higher Degree category (1,178 to 575). The reverse is found in the Post Graduate and Undergraduate diploma categories where we see the women almost doubling the men. The same trend is seen in the Basic Vocational category with 6,570 women again more than doubling the 2,628 men.

Table 17. *Qualifications of second generation by gender (absolute values and percentages).*

Level of qualification	Males		Females		Persons	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Skilled vocational	30,858	22.3	7,114	5.3	37,972	13.9
Bachelor degree	12,928	9.3	12,772	9.5	25,700	9.4
Basic vocational	2,628	1.9	6,570	4.9	9,198	3.4
Under graduate diploma	2,454	1.8	4,833	3.6	7,287	2.7
Associate diploma	4,913	3.5	4,561	3.4	9,474	3.5
Post graduate diploma	1,329	1.0	2,713	2.0	4,042	1.5
Higher degree	1,178	0.8	575	0.4	1,753	0.6

Other*	9,290	6.7	13,103	9.7	22,393	8.2
Total qualified	65,578	47.3	52,241	38.8	117,819	43.2
No qualification**	73,066	52.7	82,843	61.2	155,909	56.8
Total	138,644	100.0	135,084	100.0	273,728	100.0

*Comprises level of attainment inadequately described and level of attainment not stated.

**Includes persons still at school and not stated.

Source: 1996 Census - Customized Matrix Table CS082.

From: Community Profiles 1996 Census «Italy-born» 1999, p. 37.

Linguistic profile of the second generation. The 1991 census shows that 164,930 or 50.4% of the second generation spoke a language other than English at home. Table 18 shows that in 1996 these numbers had decreased to 140,647 or 42.2%. Of the group that makes up the second generation, only 134,112 or 40.2% spoke Italian. This was a drop of almost 10% from the previous census. While 193,233 or 57.9% claimed they only spoke English in 1996; an increase of almost 10% from 1991. As we can see from this table the numbers were fairly evenly divided between males and females.

Table 18. *Language spoken at home by the second generation, 1991-1996 (absolute values and percentages).*

	Language	1991		1996	
		No.	%	No.	%
Males	Italian	79,034	47.6	66,922	39.5
	English only	83,810	50.4	99,394	58.6
	Other*	3,332	2.0	3,295	1.9
	Total	166,176	100.0	169,611	100.0
Females	Italian	79,269	49.3	67,190	40.9
	English only	78,249	48.7	93,839	57.1
	Other*	3,295	2.0	3,240	2.0
	Total	160,813	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total	Italian	158,303	48.4	134,112	40.2
	English only	162,059	49.6	193,233	57.9
	Other*	6,627	2.0	6,535	1.9
	Total	326,989	100.0	333,880	100.0

*Includes persons who did not state a language.

Source: 1991 Census - Customized Matrix Table csc6017.

1996 Census - Customized Matrix Table CS074.

Adapted from: *Community Profile «Italy-born»*, 1994, p. 47 and 1999, p. 39.

The Italian community across generations

Since the mid-seventies two aspects concerning Italians in Australia have come to the forefront: the ageing of the community and the increasing number of the second and subsequent generations. The figure given in this article for the size of the Italian community, 572,300 includes 334,000 people of direct Italian descent, that is, with at least one parent born in Italy. Thus, the number of second generation Italian-Australians has become larger than that of the Italy-born population. In 1976 the size of the second generation was 86% that of the first generation. In 1981 it had overtaken the first generation with

an increase of 18.5% (Rosoli, 1989, p. 20; Ware, 1981, pp. 21-28). In 1991 the second generation had increased to be 29.2% larger than the first generation. By 1996 it had overtaken the first generation by 40.2%. These figures, however, does not include third and later generation Italo-Australians that as far back as 1978 already numbered around 60,000 (Price, 1986, p. 29). The 2001 census, which will include a question on ancestry, will give some indications of the number of Australians with a least one parent either first or second generation Italian.

As we saw in the breakdown of the second generation, it does show signs of being more upwardly mobile than the first, however, the figures still show that a net difference exists between Italo-Australians and Anglo-Australians in the professional and technical sectors. For the majority of young Italo-Australians work lies in the factory or in a trade, while the bulk of the women work as shop attendants; Bertelli (1987, p. 48) argues that these are jobs which traditionally have not been sought after by other Australians.

Thanks to the second generation, the Italian community seems relatively young compared to other immigrant communities in Australia. However, it is much older when compared to all the Australian population. The figures for the Italy-born outlined above point to an ageing first generation. Successive censi have indicated an increase in the number of Italians over sixty years of age, from 13% of the community in 1976 to 21.4% (over 65 years of age) in 1991, to 31.2% in 1996. These Italians find themselves confronting serious economic, cultural and linguistic problems (Rosoli, 1989, p. 20; Bertelli, 1987, p. 39; Vasta, 1985).

A more detailed analysis of the various censi gives a clearer idea as to the relative ageing of the first generation of Italians in Australia and the increase in the second generation. Of those born in Italy, in 1954 the 20-30 year-old category accounted for 37.7% of the Italian community; in 1976 this age group decreased to 26.6%, and by 1981 to 22%. In 1996 only 1.4% of the Italy born were in the 0-24 age group. The second generation shows a different trend: the 1981 census showed that 20% were in the 0-4 year-old category, 44% were of school age and only 12% were over 24 years of age. In 1991 comparable figures were that 42.5% were over the age of 24 and 20.7% were of school age. In 1996 figures still point to a relatively young group with 74.2% under 35 years of age.

Notes

- ¹ For a detailed analysis of the Australian situation see Clyne 1991 and Kipp *et al.* 1995.
- ² Persons aged 5 years and older.
- ³ This is the reason given by the Bureau of Statistics for not releasing more data concerning the second generation.

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